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ABSTRACT

Research was conducted in 2000-01 on the long-term impacts of the 200 projects funded by Australia's Framing the Future in 1999 and of the 250 conducted in 2000. Two main research methodologies (case study investigations and a survey) were used for the study. Case study investigations were conducted with the Deaf Education Network in Sydney; South Western Sydney Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE); Adult and Community Education in far north New South Wales; West Coast Institute of TAFE; Goodman Fielder and the Chisholm and Kangan Batman Institutes of TAFE in Melbourne; and Queensland Rail and the Brisbane Institute of TAFE. Additional studies are planned. The case study research indicated that high-skilled, professional vocational education and training practitioners are meeting the challenges of change in these innovative, responsive, and flexible ways: they creatively interpret training packages; they address organizational change; they network intrastate and interstate; they promote training for competitive advantage; and they influence strategic planning. The survey data was not yet analyzed. (YLB)

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# The high-skilled VET practitioner: interim findings from the evaluation of the long-term impacts of the Framing the Future projects in 1999-2000

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## Background

Framing the Future is a major staff development initiative of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). Since 1997, over 20,000 vocational education and training (VET) practitioners have participated in the program. This paper reports on research conducted in 2000-2001 on the long-term impacts of the 200 projects funded by Framing the Future in 1999 and the 250 conducted in 2000.

Anecdotal evidence, and the evidence of evaluative work already completed, suggests that Framing the Future has had impacts that go well beyond the individuals who have undertaken project work, or who have attended workshops. This was confirmed in the report *Re-framing the future: the long-term impacts of Framing the Future* (Mitchell 2000). The report covered the period 1997-1998 and found that Framing the Future had significant long-term impacts on the implementation of the National Training Framework (NTF); on the collaboration between training organisations and industry; and on staff development programs within organisations funded for a Framing the Future project. Additionally, the March 2000 report found that the impacts of Framing the Future went beyond the individual developing new skills and knowledge about the NTF, to improvements in work performance and organisational effectiveness. Framing the Future's model for staff development is now used by a number of organisations to influence organisational change. Finally, at the systemic level, it was found that Framing the Future has become an agent for change.

While the March 2000 report identified key trends and themes and provided many examples of impacts at different levels, this 2001 study will build on the earlier report, particularly by analysing a number of organisational case studies in more depth. Case study research methodology has received considerable academic support in recent decades, particularly as it caters for the study of innovations and the building of theories. Case study methodology also enables the development of generalisations and the addressing of how and why questions (Yin, *Case Study*



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*Research* 1994). These advantages of case study research methodology will enrich the data analysis in this study of Framing the Future.

The selected case studies will focus on a range of VET organisations that normally have undertaken 4-5 Framing the Future projects, to understand how the impacts of Framing the Future can be experienced by different staff and in different ways within an organisation. The evaluation will focus not just on teaching staff, but on administrative, support and management personnel, in order to identify different types of impacts. In a sense, the evaluation will examine a vertical slice of the organisation, to identify a range of possible impacts within the organisation.

The possible benefits of such in-depth case study analyses are many. In particular, the analysis will help clarify the relative importance of two sets of factors that affect the impact of Framing the Future: factors that are internal to the organisation, such as its culture and leadership, and factors that are external to the organisation, such as the interventions of the Framing the Future national management team. For instance, the case studies may provide a number of insights into the relative influence of internal factors within an organisation that influence the effectiveness of Framing the Future; the organisation's strategic goals, industry relations, the staff development unit, culture, team processes and leadership. The case studies may also provide an insight into how the external actions of the Framing the Future project management team - such as networking, workshops, website and publications - influenced both the projects and the funded organisation.

The new study is exploring in more depth a number of the findings from the March 2000 report, such as new types of provider-industry networking emerging from Framing the Future projects, the impact of Framing the Future on organisational change, the importance of readiness for innovation and the development of learning organisations as a result of undertaking a Framing the Future project. The case studies will focus on the imperative within organisations to bring about change in the organisation, in order to facilitate the implementation of the National Training Framework.

The new project also is exploring themes which complement the report *High-skilled high-performing VET*, such as ways VET staff become high-skilled and ways in which VET organisations become high-performing through staff development and change management activities related to Framing the Future. It is expected that the final report will be a valuable resource for VET staff who coordinate Framing the Future (now Reframing the Future) activities.

*The research for this study commenced in May 2000 and will conclude in May 2001.*

## Methodologies

Two main research methodologies are being used for this study: case study research and a survey. As at 30 March 2001, case study investigations had commenced with the Deaf Education Network in Sydney; the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE; Adult and Community Education in far north NSW; the West Coast Institute of TAFE; Goodman Fielder and the Chisholm and Kangan Batman Institutes of TAFE in Melbourne; and Queensland Rail and the Brisbane Institute of TAFE. Further

research will be conducted in April 2001 with a number of other organisations, including the Canberra Institute of Technology, Northern Territory University and the Agriculture and Horticulture Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB) in South Australia.

The email survey form was distributed to approximately 180 Project Contacts in April 2000 and exactly 100 replies were returned. This is a very satisfying return rate of around 56%, achieved with the active support of the Framing the Future staff. In early March 2001, the email survey form was sent to the 250 Project Contacts for 2000 projects and as at 30 March 2001, 70 were returned, with more expected in early April. These survey returns represent a very substantial sample size, providing significant insights into the attitudes and experiences of many VET practitioners currently managing change.

The email survey includes three sets of questions. The first set of questions, forming Section A, relates to the types of outcomes identified by the project managers, including unanticipated outcomes. Section B of the survey form asks respondents to provide a ranking from 1-7 for twelve different factors that may have influenced the impacts of Framing the Future. Section C invites written responses to ten open-ended questions. Open-ended questions have been used, as they can elicit a range of subtleties that may not be identified in answers to empirical questions.

## Findings

The following section provides excerpts from some initial findings from the case study research. The survey data will not be analysed until the collection of survey returns from the 2000 projects is completed.

Research to date has indicated that high-skilled, professional VET practitioners are meeting the challenges of change in innovative, responsive and flexible ways.

### The high-skilled VET practitioner creatively interpreting Training Packages

In the following snapshot from Framing the Future activities undertaken by the Deaf Education Network in Sydney, VET practitioners are described customising the Certificate II in Information Technology to suit deaf and hearing impaired learners. By permanently improving communication in the organisation, the Framing the Future project has had a positive long-term impact on the Network.

*Case study: issues of access for the deaf education network*

The Deaf Education Network is a small community-based provider in suburban Sydney that offers accredited training to deaf and hearing impaired adult learners. A large number of the teachers are themselves deaf or hearing-impaired and communicate via Auslan (Australian Sign Language), hence implementing Training Packages presents teachers at DEN with many challenges. As Auslan has no written mode, English is viewed as a second language, increasing the difficulties of interpreting and delivering Training Packages.

In 1999, the Deaf Education Network conducted two Framing the Future projects. The first project aimed to assist trainers to develop appropriate strategies to

customise the Certificate II in Information Technology for deaf and hearing impaired learners. When the group started the project, however, they realised that this was too big an aim, as the language used in the Training Package needed to be modified to allow deaf and hearing impaired teachers and learners to access it more easily. Consequently, the second project they conducted in 1999 helped to demystify Training Packages by developing 'Plain English' glossaries of the language used in the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training.

Framing the Future offered a unique opportunity for the organisation to focus on professional development. Work-based action learning is ideal for the teachers at the Deaf Education Network, who work best in small groups and who assess information visually and experientially. One participant noted that:

> The regular team meetings have been overwhelmingly successful, breaking down individual isolation and resulting in the sharing of ideas, resources, strategies and information about students.

This professional interaction had an important impact on the project participants at the time the project was conducted and, according to their final report, it also reinforced to the organisation the importance of continuing professional development.

The most important long-term impact of their involvement in Framing the Future was the increase in effective communication within the organisation.

> Through the project, participants realised that they needed time to communicate their needs to managers and they set out to develop appropriate and effective lines of communication that had not previously existed.

This increased emphasis on regular, effective communication is still part of the organisation today, months after the Framing the Future project ended.

**The high-skilled VET practitioner addressing organisational change**

Staff at the South West Institute of TAFE have used Framing the Future projects to not only address the needs of industry training, but to improve communication within Faculties that are spread across six colleges. Framing the Future has assisted staff in making communication more effective across the Institute's six colleges, through its encouragement of networking and sharing of resources and its encouragement of staff within similar discipline areas to work together where once they worked relatively independently.

*Case study: assisting organisational change at the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE*

For Judy Ryan, Framing the Future program coordinator at the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, the program has provided avenues for staff to confidently approach changes within their organisation through an increased focus on professional development:

> Staff have found that the Framing the Future projects they were involved in have given them the momentum to be involved in learning within the

> organisation. This learning has not only made staff aware of the National Training Framework agenda but it has also assisted them in meeting the challenges of organisational change.

South Western Sydney Institute consists of six colleges: Granville College, Wetherall Park, Miller College, Liverpool, Macquarie Fields and Campbelltown. It has recently moved to a Faculty structure after operating as a Federated model for a number of years. For Judy Ryan

> Framing the Future provided the mechanisms not only to establish links between discipline areas spread across the six College locations but also to maintain them by encouraging staff to use this mechanism as an opportunity to engage in learning and development activities.

Framing the Future has assisted staff in making this change through its encouragement of networking and sharing of resources and its encouragement of staff within similar discipline areas to work together where once they worked relatively independently.

While institution-based delivery still makes up the majority of delivery at the South Western Sydney Institute, Framing the Future is encouraging groups within the organisation to embrace the change brought about by Training Packages by equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to engage industry in training. For Judy Ryan, staff members involved in Framing the Future projects have become 'learners', keen and able, thanks to the action learning approach, to be more enquiring in the future.

**The high-skilled VET practitioner networking intrastate and interstate**

The plumbing staff from the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE stretched their thinking beyond their local council areas when they undertook a Framing the Future project in 2000, reaching out to their industry and to fellow VET practitioners across NSW and interstate. Since the completion of the Framing the Future project, this extensive networking has been extended and maintained.

*Case study: developing networks as part of the Plumbing Training Project, South Western Sydney Institute*

In early 2000 the plumbing section at Granville College, which makes up part of South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, commenced a Framing the Future project. The overall aim of the project was to develop the skills to assist in understanding and implementing the Plumbing, Draining and Gasfitting Training Package. As part of this development, the project sought to increase participants' networking skills both inside and outside the organisation.

While the group, as part of the project, developed extensive networks within their own, large organisation, their networks also extended across New South Wales and interstate. The group convened two meetings during 2000 and invited representatives from plumbing departments in the Sydney metropolitan area and environs, including Wollongong and Wyong. At these meetings, representatives were encouraged to share their knowledge of Training Packages, and at the second meeting the South Western Sydney Institute Faculty Director responsible for plumbing as well as a representative from the NSW Construction ITAB were present.

For Peter Smith, Head Teacher of plumbing at Granville College, the input from the NSW Construction ITAB representative was invaluable, as he was able to fill in the knowledge gaps the group had about the Training Package.

As part of the project, a newsletter was generated that was sent to plumbing departments at institutes across NSW, and the group liaised with the Master Plumbers Association across Australia. In addition, three project participants went to a Victorian Plumbing Teachers Conference held in Halls Gap in Western Victoria towards the end of 2000. At the conference they were able to network with Victorian counterparts and share knowledge and discuss issues relating to the Plumbing Training Package.

Since the project finished, the networks established have been maintained and widened. According to Peter, representatives from different institutes in NSW, and also Victoria, have kept in touch via email and are still sharing ideas and discussing various approaches to their current training delivery and what they intend to do in the future. As well as continued email contact, the Spotlight on the Provider conference in Hobart late last year also gave the group an opportunity to maintain and enhance their networks.

> We have found that all players are getting together with industry, the Construction ITAB and interstate representatives as never before. All parties are grateful for the networking that has been created and we feel we are keeping the lines of communication open with one another more now than has been the case in recent times.

**The high-skilled VET practitioner promoting training for competitive advantage**

The following story gives an insight into a national company that is operating in a highly competitive environment. Through encouraging learning and development amongst the staff at Goodman Fielder, Ursula Groves, who manages Learning and Organisational Development in the Baking division of the company, is developing a highly skilled workforce able to meet the demands of the competitive environment in which they operate.

*Case study: training for a competitive edge, Goodman Fielder*

Goodman Fielder is Australia's largest food manufacturer and one of the world's 50 largest food companies. It operates in a highly competitive market sector, making, distributing and marketing the products from many well-recognised brands such as Sunicrust, Helgas, Buttercup, Uncle Toby's and Meadow Lea. Across Australia there are 20,000 employees, with 5,000 of them working in the baking sector at 34 bakeries in every State and Territory.

Goodman Fielder is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), and while it has always provided development opportunities, there has been a recent push to strengthen learning processes within the organisation to make them more effective. Ursula Groves is Manager of Learning and Organisational Development in the Baking division of Goodman Fielder. Her aim is to make the company a learning organisation and she believes that:

> People development can provide Goodman Fielder with a competitive advantage, particularly in the current environment, which is highly competitive and challenging.

In 1999 and 2000 the organisation took part in two Framing the Future projects, both of which assisted participants to develop practical, responsive learning and assessment strategies for staff in the manufacturing and distribution functions of the company. For Ursula, the two projects have had valuable impacts on the organisation. The first project that was run looked at ways to implement the Food Processing (Plant Baking) Training Package within the organisation. Participants included full time training staff, and production managers and team leaders with responsibilities for training from Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. For Ursula, the group learnt a lot and, because it was the first project undertaken at Goodman Fielder, their approach was quite experimental:

> We achieved some great outcomes. The network that we established as part of the project is still going a year and a half later, which for a national company is extremely beneficial.

The second project used the lessons learnt in the previous project and targeted development for staff involved in distribution at Goodman Fielder. There were four distribution coordinators that participated from bakeries in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. There has been a recent national push within the organisation to encourage drivers to increase the number of products that they are distributing. The project developed transport and distribution assessment tools that integrated some sales competencies. According to Ursula:

> We see this as a way to increase the skills of our staff and give the organisation a competitive edge.

While the two projects provided tangible results, they also helped the organisation to become more of a learning organisation. For Ursula, whose goal this is, this has been a valuable long-term impact.

> Framing the Future involved people who are not usually part of structured learning. They began to see the value in the development and assessment we were planning to deliver in the organisation and they saw that what we were proposing was not about pulling people off the job and putting them in a classroom. Framing the Future has been a catalyst for changing people's perceptions.

### The high-skilled VET practitioners influencing strategic planning

West Coast College of TAFE invented a sophisticated staffing structure for its Framing the Future project teams, to ensure that the projects were effective and influenced corporate strategic planning. Three groups of staf4f are involved in projects: strategic decision makers; teachers and administrators; and facilitators and project managers.

*Case study: West Coast College of TAFE (Western Australia)*

West College of TAFE is one of the largest TAFE Colleges in Western Australia. There are four major campuses: Joondalup, Balga, Carine and an Adult Migrant Education Service in the heart of Perth. Across these campuses there are some 42,000 students enrolled each year, serviced by about 650 full-time staff and 1000 sessional

staff. Over the last few years, the College has been faced with a number of challenges in adapting to the changes within the VET sector as a result of the introduction of the National Training Framework.

QRD Consulting, the research and development arm of West Coast College, was established in 1994 to assist the College in meeting many of these challenges. For Moira Watson, Manager of QRD Consulting:

> Framing the Future has definitely helped us to achieve organisational goals and make the College more strategic and responsive.

During 1999 and 2000, West Coast College conducted eleven Framing the Future projects. Each of the projects was designed to address specific issues within the organisation and was conducted in a way that would ensure maximum impact for the College. According to Moira, the structure of the project teams, with involvement from key individuals and groups within the organisation has meant that the projects have had valuable, long-term impacts.

> Three different teams are involved in the running of Framing the Future projects at West Coast College. The Associate Team is made up of strategic decision makers from the College who are usually Campus Directors or Managers. They meet during the life of the project to discuss the implications of the project and what strategic decisions need to be made to ensure that the project has an impact after it has been completed. The Project Team or Core Team is made up of project participants who are usually the teachers and administrators at the College. It is their work that informs the strategic discussions at the Associate Team level. In the middle is QRD Consulting who are the facilitators and project managers. Generally, there is a Project Sponsor, usually the Managing Director or Director Academic Development, who acts as the overall project mentor.

In this way, with all the different parties involved, our Framing the Future projects work from and also inform the College's strategic directions. In fact, the *West Coast College Strategic Directions 2001–2005* was informed by the Framing the Future projects we ran in 1999 and 2000.

## Discussion

VET practitioners portrayed in the case studies outlined above, and involved in responding to a changing training environment, include teachers, many of whom are now actively engaging with industry in the workplace; human resource managers and staff development managers, who are identifying changing staff development needs and influencing corporate planning; administrative and management staff, who are developing new procedures to support more flexible approaches to the management of training and to the provision of staff development; and senior managers, who are vigorously identifying a strategic fit between their organisations, the requirements of the National Training Framework and the training needs of industry.

The case study research undertaken to date highlights the professional expertise of VET practitioners faced by the multiple challenges of implementing the National Training Framework at a time of increasing change in industry, brought about by

factors such as globalisation and the continual spread of information and communication technologies. The professional expertise captured in the case studies includes using pedagogical skills to customise Training Packages; developing innovative and enduring networks with industry and other training colleagues; redesigning staff development to meet the challenges of the National Training Framework; improving organisational cooperation and learning; and changing corporate strategic plans to better suit the needs of clients.

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